The Postcolonial Politics of International Organizations Law

BY **Dr Guy Sinclair**
Victoria University of Wellington

19 FEBRUARY 2018, MONDAY
5.00PM – 7.00PM *(TEA RECEPTION STARTS AT 4.45PM)*
LEE SHERIDAN CONFERENCE ROOM, LEVEL 1, EU TONG SEN BUILDING
FACULTY OF LAW, NUS (BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS)

ABSTRACT

What is the relationship between colonialism and the law of international organizations (IOs)? While a growing body of literature has explored the imperialist dynamics in early and contemporary IOs, standard disciplinary accounts remain strongly Eurocentric, tracing the beginnings of modern IOs to the 'move to institutions' among European states at the end of World War I, and attributing the construction of IOs law to Western jurists. In contrast, this paper proposes an alternative account of IOs law as a postcolonial phenomenon, developed in the transition from a world of empires to a world of nation-states. The paper argues that IOs law, properly understood, did not emerge until the closing stages of World War II; and that its evolution was strongly influenced by the accelerating processes of decolonization that accompanied its birth. The politics of decolonization—centered in particular on the problem(s) of the postcolonial state—thus shaped the practice of IOs, provided the catalyst for many of the foundational cases in the discipline, and motivated much of its early doctrinal scholarship. Moreover, the paper argues that the deep structure of IOs law is postcolonial inasmuch as it is based on a functional logic which, by supporting the division of the world into nation-states, cuts against the territorial logic of empires. Understanding the postcolonial politics of IOs law helps to shed light on the principal problems faced in the field today, including questions concerning the responsibility of IOs.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Guy Fiti Sinclair is a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington Law School. His principal area of scholarship and teaching is public international law, with a focus on the history and theory of international law. Dr. Sinclair is the author of *To Reform the World: International Organizations and the Making of Modern States* (OUP, 2017). He is currently working on a project on 'Making International Economic Law: The Interaction of Institutions', supported by a grant awarded by the Royal Society of New Zealand. Dr. Sinclair holds first degrees in law and history from the University of Auckland, and a Doctorate from New York University School of Law, where he was a Fulbright scholar. He has been the Associate Editor of the European Journal of International Law since 2012, and is an Associate Director of the New Zealand Centre for Public Law.

Participation is By Invitation Only

Registration commences at 4.45pm and light refreshments will be served. For more information, please contact Ms Yvonne Lim at lawylhh@nus.edu.sg